

Clinical Trials: Myths and Facts

MYTH: *Only people who have cancer are eligible to participate in a cancer clinical trial.*

FACT: Three types of cancer trials are available to people without cancer

- Prevention trials, which study ways to prevent cancer
- Early detection/screening trials, which look at ways to improve the early detection of cancer
- Diagnostic trials, which focus on ways to test for cancer or better identify it.

Each study has its own guidelines about who can participate. Generally, participants are alike in key ways—such as the type and stage of cancer they have, their age, their gender, and other factors.

MYTH: *Cancer treatment clinical trials only provide “last resort” treatment.*

FACT: Cancer clinical trials are not only for patients in the end stages of their disease, but for many newly diagnosed cancer patients as well. If only the sickest patients participated in treatment trials, researchers would not know how to treat patients with earlier stages of cancer. Phase 3 treatment clinical trials cover all stages of cancer, from the most advanced to the most localized.

MYTH: *People who join clinical trials are “guinea pigs” for research.*

FACT: People who decide to take part in a clinical trial are called participants, and strict guidelines are in place to ensure that these volunteers are treated humanely. A participant has the right to withdraw from a trial at any time. The participant may also discuss further treatment options with the study physician or be referred back to a primary care provider for standard care. Survey results show 97 percent of people were treated with dignity and respect, and that the quality of care they received was "excellent" or "good."

MYTH: *Cancer clinical trials benefit only the researchers, not the patients.*

FACT: All cancer clinical trials are designed to show how a particular anticancer strategy—for instance, a promising drug, a gene therapy treatment, a new diagnostic test, or a possible way to prevent cancer—affects the people who receive it. Each study tries to answer scientific questions to find better ways to prevent, diagnose, or treat cancer.

MYTH: *Positive results from studies conducted on mice translate into positive outcomes for humans.*

FACT: A clinical trial is one of the stages of a long and careful cancer research process. Getting promising results from testing a new drug on mice, for example, is a preliminary step to human research studies. Treatments that work well in mice do not always work well in people.

MYTH: *There are no real benefits from participating in clinical trials.*

FACT: People can benefit from clinical trials. In treatment trials, for example, participants receive high-quality cancer care—and will be among the first to benefit if a new approach is proven to work.

MYTH: *New treatments are always better than standard treatments.*

FACT: New treatments under study are not always better than, or even as good as, standard treatments—and they may have unexpected side effects. Through a process called informed consent, participants learn about a study's treatments and tests, and their possible benefits and risks, before deciding whether or not to participate. See clinical trials section of cancer.gov for more information.

MYTH: *Many people who join cancer treatment clinical trials get a sugar pill (placebo) instead of being treated.*

FACT: In treatment trials involving people who have cancer, placebos are very rarely used.

MYTH: *No clinical trials are being conducted in my area because it's small and rural.*

FACT: Clinical trials are underway all over the country—in cancer centers, other major medical centers, community hospitals and clinics, physicians' offices and veterans' and military hospitals in numerous cities and towns around the United States.

MYTH: *I cannot participate in a clinical trial because it is not covered by health insurance.*

FACT: Health plans and managed care providers do not always cover all patient care costs in a study. What they cover varies by plan and by study. Ask a doctor, nurse or social worker from the study to help you determine in advance what costs are covered. The research costs, such as data management, are covered by the study sponsor.

**For more information, visit the clinical trials section of
www.cancer.gov or call 1-800-4-CANCER**

